

## *Digital Divide*

TWENTY YEARS AGO THIS FALL, I made the leap into the digital age. Having hammered out essays through my undergrad years on a baby-blue Brother typewriter, in my final year, to the consternation of my technologically advanced housemates, I decided that grad school demanded an upgrade.

Adieu, the visceral pleasure of pounding keys to strike letterforms on 20-pound paper (or whatever weight the stationers sold before society became environmentally conscious). My chequebook bears witness: on September 16, 2003, I wrote a cheque for \$2,234.16 and took possession of a desktop PC complete with modem, black-and-white monitor and—splurge!—a laser printer.

I was no computer neophyte, however. The previous year, I had prepared newsletters for a not-for-profit on a small Mac; five years earlier I had studied Fortran (originally developed in the 1950s as the IBM Mathematical Formula Translating System); and as early as 1985 I had toyed with its derivative language, Basic.

But now, with the power to generate my own pages of text and transfer chunks of text across telephone wires, my engagement with the printed word both as a reader and a writer became more dynamic.

An engineering friend introduced me to e-mail, and I delighted in searching library catalogues using numeric addresses and interfaces familiar from my programming courses.

I laid out my master's thesis. I began compiling the Word document that would become my first book, which credits me with the typography (amusing then, disturbing now). I began connecting with editors and building a career as a freelance writer, tapping into an exclusive world that has become increasingly less so as digital platforms have evolved.

The changes in writing and publishing

that have made my career possible are the subject of Dennis Baron's book *A Better Pencil: Readers, Writers, and the Digital Revolution* (Oxford, 2009). Reading his book this summer, however, I saw clearly just how the pace of change has accelerated. One laughs at passages where Baron discusses the trust we place in (or withhold from) online texts, or the advances Facebook was making just five years ago as it became a byword for social media.

Baron's survey of developments in communication technologies takes a progressive stance, as the title suggests, describing digitized texts as "the next stage, not the last stage, in the saga of human communication." Yet he frankly admits that he doesn't know where these technologies are leading.

Happily, this issue of *Amphora* includes several essays from the front lines of publishing, bookselling and librarianship.

Scott McIntyre discusses a lifetime in the book trade in an edited version of a presentation he delivered at the annual meeting of the Alcuin Society this past summer. The pressures facing Canada's publishers and booksellers have mounted as competition has increased—not merely from online retailers. The volume model of bookselling that has increased the content available to readers has effectively reduced the value of all content—not to mention the trade's margins—in what amounts to a race to the bottom dollar.

The knock-on effect is felt by booksellers, and Paul Whitney reviews the memoirs of David Mason for insights into how the trade has changed—a theme Mason takes up in a special excerpt from the book.

Finally, librarian Sarah Sutherland looks at the fate of the libraries charged—but not necessarily adequately funded—to maintain pertinent collections for their users. Recognizing that change

is constant, Sutherland muses on how the books in these collections can be put to the best use as priorities change and new titles become available.

While there may well be more challenges than answers as print culture evolves, Sutherland's essay reminds me of the old question "Now that we can do anything, what will we do?" One can't future-proof a library's content, but

understanding the context of the various pursuits of book artists, booksellers and collectors will go a long ways in helping everyone who participates in the culture of books respond to the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

~ Peter Mitham, editor

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## LETTERS

### *Value Proposition*

*What is the value of a gift of books, and how rigorous should the valuation process be? Paul Whitney's column in Amphora 163, "Gifts that keep on taking," addressed the topic—and drew feedback from the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of Canada.*

*The column was inspired by three articles David Baines, the Vancouver Sun's long-standing business reporter, wrote prior to his retirement earlier this year that examined the valuation—and value to taxpayers—of a donation of Chinese-language books to the Richmond Public Library in Richmond, B.C.*

*The following response from ABAC president Marvin Post, proprietor of Attic Books in London, Ontario, took issue with the column, and particularly the original article by David Baines.*

#### AN EXCELLENT CHOICE

I have read the article "Gifts that keep on taking" by Paul Whitney, based on an earlier piece in the *Vancouver Sun* by David Baines. The original article was full of misrepresentations and... the reputation of the appraiser was also damaged in the original article. The donation and the appraisal have both been exonerated by Canada Revenue Agency after an audit.

I find it amazing that a retired librarian such as Mr. Whitney does not see value in books. At a time when most library and archives purchasing budgets have been slashed, donations form a cost-effective way of obtaining an up-to-date and diverse collection. This donation was large and would have taken some time to create.

As an accredited appraiser myself (Canadian Personal Property Appraisers Group) and president of the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association of Canada (ABAC), I am surprised to find Mr. Whitney's article promotes one appraisal organization, the International Society of Appraisers (ISA). This group consists of full-time appraisers in many fields with a heavy emphasis on appraising art and antiques. ISA lists 16 appraisers of books, none of whom were in Canada at the time of the appraisal, although one is now listed in St. Catharines, Ontario. None have any working knowledge of books in Chinese.

Bjarne Tokerud lives and works in British Columbia and is a professional bookseller of long and good standing in ABAC. He is also one of the few appraisers in North America with any knowledge of Chinese. As such, Mr. Tokerud is an excellent choice for performing this type of appraisal and the City of Richmond wisely spent a moderate sum acquiring an appraisal from Mr. Tokerud. As professional appraisers are paid for time and expenses, it would have been very costly to import an American appraiser, who would have taken longer and racked up more expenses for travel and lodging. Furthermore, the imported appraiser would have probably consulted with Mr. Tokerud in order to make a credible report. This is an extra layer of expense for the taxpayer...

Appraisals, appraisal standards, and appraisal law are all currently in flux due to the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice